



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Ysgol Tir Morfa  
Ffordd Derwen  
Rhyl  
Denbighshire  
LL18 2RN**

**Date of inspection: May 2018**

**by**

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
and Training in Wales**

## About Ysgol Tir Morfa

Ysgol Tir Morfa is a day special school situated across two sites in Rhyl and maintained by Denbighshire local authority. The school provides placements for pupils aged 3 to 19 years who have a statement of special educational needs, or who are undergoing statutory assessment.

Pupils at the school have a range of needs, including autistic spectrum disorders, speech, language and communication needs and moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties.

There are currently 136 pupils on roll, of whom just under 50% are eligible for free school meals. Nearly all the pupils are from homes where English is the main spoken language.

The school aims to provide a happy, safe learning environment to nurture pupils in lifelong communication, independence and life skills.

The school was last inspected in December 2011. The current headteacher took up post in April 2017.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.  
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

## Summary

Ysgol Tir Morfa is a day special school that places great focus on providing a caring, nurturing learning experience for all its pupils. Staff, governors and pupils fully embrace the school's motto 'Learning to live, living to learn'.

Over time, in relation to their needs and abilities, nearly all pupils make excellent progress in developing their independence skills. Pupil behaviour in classes and around the two school sites is usually exemplary.

Staff foster positive, close and respectful working relationships with pupils. Teachers use well their knowledge of pupils' needs and areas for development in planning stimulating learning experiences. The curriculum builds successfully on pupils' existing knowledge and understanding.

Leaders ensure positive outcomes for pupils, giving them the necessary skills to be happy, safe and as independent as possible. Leaders place a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and building positive staff-pupil relationships.

| <b>Inspection area</b>                     | <b>Judgement</b> |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Standards</b>                           | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b> | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>   | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Care, support and guidance</b>          | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>           | <b>Good</b>      |

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Develop the curriculum in order to extend the range of accreditation on offer, particularly for the more able
- R2 Develop consistent approaches to the use of agreed communication strategies across the school
- R3 Address the site security and wellbeing issues identified during the inspection
- R4 Strengthen self-evaluation procedures

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to keeping parents informed about their children's progress, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Good**

Nearly all pupils at Ysgol Tir Morfa make strong progress in meeting their individual learning and communication targets.

Across the school, many pupils express themselves effectively and enjoy conversation and humour. Their accomplished social skills enable them to create a warm atmosphere at the on-site Caffi Morfa, where they provide good quality customer service.

A minority of pupils use electronic devices, signs and symbols to support their communication. However, they do not always use them as effectively as they could.

Many pupils enjoy expressing themselves through drama and music. They sing and dance in the eisteddfod and perform in school concerts.

Nearly all pupils gain well-developed social skills. They support each other enthusiastically and are often keen to work on tasks with their peers, in pairs and small groups. For example, pupils jointly plan a topic for a presentation and then listen attentively to the suggestions of their peers.

Many pupils write well for different audiences, including producing thoughtfully considered poetry. Older, more able pupils produce extended pieces of work and use punctuation and paragraphs well to put more meaning into their writing. They enjoy reading, locate facts well and talk confidently about their favourite books.

Many pupils make steady progress with their numerical skills such as dealing with money, measurement and weighing. Pupils use these skills effectively to shop for ingredients to prepare food in the café and buy flowers for the on-site flower shop, Posies. Pupils working in these enterprises behave in a mature manner appropriate to the work environment. They develop valuable skills that prepare them well for their future.

Many pupils increase in confidence in using information communication technology (ICT) and can locate files and store work for the next lesson. They do not always use their ICT skills well enough across the curriculum to support their learning. Where appropriate, pupils use ICT to operate switches and explore how they can cause and effect change.

Pupils express themselves creatively with well-crafted work such as models, sculptures and wall murals. They are proud of the attractive displays around the school made with visiting artists. In one class, to support their learning on the solar system, they construct 2D models of the solar system in class and 3D models in the grounds of the school.

Many pupils develop their basic Welsh language skills well. They spontaneously use the phrases they have learnt in class to ask and answer questions.

Pupils gain a narrow range of accredited qualifications to evidence their learning.

Over time, nearly all pupils make excellent progress in developing their independence skills. They understand about keeping themselves safe in their home and in public places such as the park. A few pupils learn to travel independently on public transport to their work placements.

Older pupils gain valuable skills from their work experience placements. They respond maturely to the support provided and a minority of pupils eventually attend work unsupported, at local businesses, such as catering, retail and construction. Nearly all pupils who leave the school move on to further education, training or the world of work.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse trends in overall performance over time because of the wide range of pupils' special educational needs. There are no significant differences between the performance of all pupils and that of boys and girls, those pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Nearly all pupils at Ysgol Tir Morfa have high standards of wellbeing. They feel safe whilst attending the school and there are very few incidents of bullying. Most pupils know whom to go to if they are worried or concerned. Across both sites of the school, pupils build very positive and respectful relationships with staff. This is a particularly strong feature of the school.

Nearly all pupils are polite and demonstrate respect for each other and staff. They form trusting relationships and this contributes positively to the progress many make, particularly in raising their self-confidence and resilience.

Pupils benefit from the good opportunities offered to learn about keeping fit. Many use the outdoor play equipment confidently during lunch and break times. A minority of pupils access after-school clubs twice a week for football and dance. Many pupils make very effective use of the activities on site and in the community to develop their health and fitness. For example, they access the local leisure centre for activities such as aqua rumba, enjoy cycling and undertake gardening activities on site and at Nant Clwyd house in Ruthin.

Many pupils develop their understanding of basic hygiene and keeping healthy. They gain useful skills in how to prepare fresh foods for themselves, some of which they have grown in the school garden.

Over time at the school, most pupils develop a good understanding of right and wrong. They respond effectively to the helpful staff modelling of appropriate behaviour throughout the school day. Pupil behaviour in classes and around the two school sites is usually exemplary. Pupils take ownership of their own behaviour and learn to manage their emotions well. They appreciate Barney, the onsite therapy dog who supports their emotional development. Many pupils are happy, polite and confident and enjoy interacting with each other and staff in class and during break times.

Most pupils are enthusiastic in their learning and are keen to share and discuss their work with staff and visitors. Generally, they settle quickly to work, concentrate well when following instructions, and persevere diligently. Pupils are proud of their work and are clearly motivated to participate in the majority of activities during the school day. Most pupils make good progress in their social and communication skills, and build successfully on these skills as they move through the school.

Nearly all pupils respond exceptionally well to the caring ethos of the school. This is particularly evident in the way they treat each other and take responsibility for supporting their peers, such as older pupils reading to younger pupils. Overall attendance is high and reflects pupils' enjoyment of the learning experiences and friendships the school supports. The reduction in the amount of time lost through exclusion ensures that pupils are in school and ready to learn.

The work of school council is developing well and having a positive impact on pupils' life at school. For instance, pupils attending the Grange Road site raised an issue with school council members over the inconsistency in the wearing of uniforms between the two sites. School council members discussed the issue with passion and were able to present well-balanced arguments for and against the concerns raised.

Many pupils develop their understanding of the importance of citizenship, equality and ecology issues. They are working towards the Rights Respecting Schools Award. Their learning is helping them learn to respect and accept the views of others.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

The quality of teaching is good overall and well matched to the learning needs of the pupils.

Nearly all staff foster positive, close and respectful working relationships with pupils. Most manage behaviour effectively and sensitively. The school provides a nurturing and positive working environment. Classrooms are full of pupils' work and photographs of accomplishments, and are a celebration of pupils' achievements.

Teachers produce suitably detailed plans and schemes of work, which take good account of previous work, pupils' needs and skills development. Individual targets for pupils or small groups are identified and support staff and teachers successfully ensure that these are achieved.

Many teachers successfully use their knowledge and understanding of their pupils' needs and areas for development in planning activities and tasks. They also ask suitably challenging questions to enable many pupils to make good progress. They offer praise and recognition for pupil effort and give useful feedback on how to improve.

The curriculum builds successfully on pupils' existing knowledge and understanding. The school provides a stimulating range of learning experiences to challenge pupils and develop their interests. It has recently refined its approach to provide valuable opportunities to improve work place skills. Caffi Morfa and Posies flower shop, which

are open to the public, support pupils to develop their skills in numeracy and communication. However, the range of accredited courses available to the most able pupils is too narrow.

Throughout the school, teachers make imaginative use of the outdoor areas, such as the well-tended vegetable and herb gardens, to support pupils' learning. Teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils use their number skills to solve everyday problems. For example, pupils measure the lengths of wood required to make the raised flower beds into which they plant flowers to sell in the shop. Through these and a wide range of other suitable experiences, the school develops pupils' independence skills. Where appropriate, post-16 pupils are encouraged to use bus timetable apps on their phone in order to develop the skills to travel independently.

The school suitably promotes and celebrates Welsh language and culture. For example, staff greet pupils in basic Welsh around the school, hold an annual eisteddfod and celebrate Diwrnod Santes Dwynwen.

The school's therapy dog Barney provides a range of beneficial learning experiences for pupils. These include greeting pupils in the morning as they arrive, providing comfort when they are sad or anxious and helping pupils learn how to care for an animal.

There is a well co-ordinated approach to the development of pupils' skills. For example, staff and speech and language therapists work well together to provide valuable support for pupils with communication needs. There are appropriate arrangements in place to train staff in the use of devices to support communication and in the use of signs and symbols. However, there are inconsistencies in the use of agreed communication strategies across the school.

There are regular opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT and digital skills. At the Grange Road site, pupils are confident when they create animation of scenes from Romeo and Juliet.

Provision for developing pupils' creativity is a strength of the school. The school recently took part in a photographic competition 'My Wales'. All groups of pupils took part in the competition and the high quality entries are proudly displayed around the school.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school's partnership with parents is a particular strength. The highly valuable relationships enable the school to achieve a holistic view of each pupil and ensure that they receive the appropriate academic, wellbeing or health support, both within the school setting and at home.

Staff provide appropriate support and guidance to help pupils overcome challenges that get in the way of their learning. This includes close work with families to help them access support for pupils' emotional wellbeing, which leads to improved attendance.

The school very effectively helps parents to support pupils to continue their learning at home during the evenings, weekends and holidays. When appropriate, it offers home-based training, such as mindfulness and relaxation sessions, to help overcome specific issues.



The school works very well with its partners to develop provision and support to meet pupils' health and learning needs. It holds regular and useful joint assessment clinics with a range of partners and therapists. This allows parents easy access to advice and support within school and provides minimal disruption to the pupils' education.

Pupil-centred annual reports, regular parents' evenings, phone calls and newsletters keep parents updated. The school's use of digital communication and social media is extremely well developed and a very strong feature of its work, enabling staff to share pupils' successes immediately with home.

The school is a calm, well-managed environment. Staff deal promptly and very effectively with incidents of difficult behaviour. They foster a strong ethos of nurture and support, where pupils are encouraged to be considerate of others and think about the consequences of their actions.

The school has a range of highly appropriate methods to monitor pupil progress and wellbeing. Nearly all teachers use progress information well to inform planning for pupils' next steps, rigorously track pupils' progress against their set targets, and actively involve parents and pupils in the process. There is strong evidence that whole-school monitoring and tracking has a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, because these methods are new, much of the data does not allow effective comparison with past years. In relation to monitoring pupils' behaviour, there is comprehensive data to confirm that, over many years, the school has reduced the number of incidents of pupils' challenging behaviour.

The school promotes healthy eating and drinking effectively. It develops pupils' awareness of the importance of taking regular exercise. The provision of a vegetable plot where pupils grow vegetables, and the school café where they prepare food, supports pupils' understanding of the relationship between growing and eating food. There are regular opportunities for pupils to take part in a range of sports and activities, such as cycling, gymnastics and games, during the school day and in after-school clubs where they learn street dancing, art and football. A stay at a residential centre enables a minority of pupils to enjoy exciting outdoor activities, such as canoeing and climbing.

Caffi Morfa, Posies and Re-cycles, the bicycle repair shop, give pupils the opportunity to develop essential work and life skills to prepare them for their future. For example, they work together, budget and communicate with the public.

The personal and social education programme is a well-developed feature of the school. Good joint work helps to promote pupils' personal safety. For example, the local police constable leads classes on appropriate friendships, internet safety and social behaviours. This work is particularly helpful in supporting pupils at high risk of exploitation.

Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their experiences in regular mindfulness sessions. Assemblies give opportunities for pupils to recognise and celebrate each other's successes.

The school actively encourages pupils to be creative and use their imaginations. For example, pupils write letters to astronauts and perform in the school eisteddfod. There are regular opportunities for them to improve their understanding about Wales and the wider community.

Generally, the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements. However, concerns about aspects of the school's arrangements for wellbeing and site security were shared during the visit.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The school community benefits from the inspirational leadership of the headteacher. Aably supported by the assistant headteacher, she articulates a purposeful and ambitious vision of providing high quality and relevant learning experiences for all pupils. Her drive to ensure positive outcomes for pupils, giving them the necessary skills to be happy, safe and as independent as possible, is at the heart of all the school's work. Staff, governors and pupils fully embrace the school's motto, 'Learning to live, living to learn'.

In a relatively short period under the new leadership, pupils' standards of wellbeing and attitudes to learning have improved, and there has been a clear improvement in the consistency of teacher assessment, planning and capacity of middle leaders. The headteacher has invested substantially in beneficial whole-school activities to improve staff wellbeing, such as after-school circuit training and mindfulness sessions. As a result, the days lost to staff absence have significantly reduced.

Leaders hold weekly meetings that focus on important and relevant school issues. Action points from these meetings and those responsible for them are clear. Regular line management meetings between leaders and their teams provide useful opportunities for staff to reflect and share good practice. Performance management procedures for teachers are consistent and suitable targets are set that are in line with whole-school priorities. Expectations of all staff are high and any underperformance is challenged sensitively but robustly.

The governing body strongly supports the headteacher well in her drive for school improvement. Governors know the school very well and provide suitable challenge to ensure the best possible provision and outcomes for the pupils and staff.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures are developing suitably. The school has a clear and realistic quality assurance calendar in order to monitor the effectiveness of its work. Leaders gather valuable first-hand evidence on the quality of teaching through regular monitoring activities. For example, they conduct beneficial learning walks, undertake lesson observations and review pupils' work. However, leaders do not currently make enough use of the evidence from these activities to evaluate pupil standards across the school.

Leaders regularly gather the views of pupils, parents, staff and governors on aspects of the school's work. The headteacher has made productive use of the findings from staff questionnaires in order to plan for improvement. Arrangements for responding to findings from other stakeholders are developing appropriately. Overall, leaders are honest about the school's work and use the range of available evidence well to identify suitable and important whole-school priorities in the useful school improvement plan. Actions, responsibilities and completion dates are clear and progress is regularly updated.

Leaders place a particularly strong focus on individual and whole-school professional development and are highly supportive of staff who aspire to improve their own performance. There are valuable opportunities for staff at all levels to gain training and experience in various important aspects of pedagogy and leadership. The school runs a beneficial and well-considered weekly training programme for staff targeted at specific areas of the school improvement plan. Whole-school training has had a significant impact on improving areas such as tracking of pupils' standards, behaviour management and the provision for the development of the Welsh language.

The new leadership has managed to eliminate a deficit budget. Leaders have been creative in seeking external resources. They continue to invest strategically in staff expertise and experience in order to provide high-quality provision for pupils. Teachers and support staff are deployed effectively and efficiently.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Excellent</b>                                   | Very strong, sustained performance and practice                          |
| <b>Good</b>  | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement          |
| <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>              | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| <b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b> | Important weaknesses outweigh strengths                                  |

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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